

Almache answerde unto that similitude,
Of whennes comth thyn answering so rude?
Of whennes? quod she, whan that she was freyned,
Of conscience and of good feith unfeyned.

Almachius seyde: Ne takestow noon heede
Of my power? And she answerde hym this:
Youre myght, quod she, ful litel is to dreede;
for every mortal mannes power nys
But lyke a bladdre, ful of wynd, ywys,
for with a nedles poynt, whan it is blowe,
May al the boost of it be leyd ful lowe.

AL wrongfully bigonne thou, quod he,
And yet in wrong is thy perseveraunce;
Wostow nat how oure myghty princes free
han thus comanded and maad ordinaunce,
That every cristen wight shal han penaunce
But if that he his cristendom withseye,
And goon al quit, if he wole it reneye?

NOWRE princes erren, as youre nobleye dooth,
Quod tho Cecile, and with a wood sentence
Ye make us gilty, and it is nat sooth;
for ye, that knowen wel oure innocence,
for as muche as we doon a reverence
To Crist, and for we bere a cristen name,
Ye putte on us a cryme, and eek a blame.

But we that knowen thilke name so
for vertuous, we may it not withseye.
Almache answerde, Chees oon of thise two,
Do sacrifice, or cristendom reneye,
That thou mowe now escapen by that weye.
At which the hooly blisful faire mayde
Gan for to laughe, and to the juge sayde,

O juge, confus in thy nyctee,
Wostow that I reneye innocence,
To make me a wikked wight? quod she;
Lo! he dissymuleth heere in audience,
He stareth and woodeth in his advertence!

O whom Almachius, Unsely wrecche!
Ne woostow nat how far my myght may
strecche?

Han noght oure myghty princes to me yeven,
Ye, bothe power and auctoritee
To maken folk to dyen or to lyven?
Why spekestow so proudly thanne to me?
I speke noght but stedfastly, quod she,
Nat proudly, for I seye, as for my syde,
We haten deedly thilke vice of pryde.

And if thou drede nat a sooth to heere,
Thanne wol I shewe al openly, by right,
That thou hast maad a ful gret lesyng heere.
Thou seyst, thy princes han thee yeven myght
Bothe for to sleen and for to quyken a wight;
Thou, that ne mayst but oonly lyf bireve,
Thou hast noon oother power, ne no leve!

But thou mayst seyn, thy princes han thee maked
Ministre of deeth; for if thou speke of mo,

Thou lvest, for thy power is ful naked.
Do wey thy booldnesse! seyde Almachius tho,
And sacrifice to oure goddes, er thou go;
I recche nat what wrong that thou me profre,
for I can suffre it as a philosopre;

But thilke wronges may I nat endure
That thou spekest of oure goddes heere, quod he.
Cecile answerde, O nyce creature!
Thou seydest no word syn thou spak to me
That I ne knew therwith thy nyctee;
And that thou were, in every maner wise,
A lewed officer and a veyn justise!

Ther lakketh nothyng to thyne outter eyen
That thou nart blynd, for thyng that we seen alle
That it is stoon, that men may well espyen,
That ilke stoon a god thou wolt it calle.
I rede thee, lat thyn hand upon it falle,
And taste it wel, and stoon thou shalt it fynde,
Syn that thou seest nat with thyne eyen blynde.

It is a shame that the peple shal
So scorne thee, and laughe at thy folye;
for comunly men woot it wel overal,
That myghty God is in his hevenes hye,
And thise ymages, wel thou mayst espye,
To thee, ne to himself, mowe noght profite,
for in effect they been nat worth a myte.

THISE wordes and swiche other seyde she;
And he weex wrooth, and bad men sholde hire
lede
Hom til hir hous. And in hire hous, quod he,
Brenne hire right in a bath of flambe rede.
And as he bad, right so was doon in dede;
for in a bath they gonne hire faste shetten,
And nyght and day greet fyre they under betten.

The longe nyght, and eek a day also,
for al the fyr and eek the bathes heete,
She sat al coold, and feelede no wo,
It made hire nat a drope for to sweete.
But in that bath hir lyf she moste lete;
for he, Almachius, with ful wikke entente
To sleen hire in the bath his sonde sente.

THRE strokes in the nekke he smoot hire tho,
The tormentour, but for no maner chaunce
He myghte noght smyte al hir nekke atwo;
And for ther was that tyme an ordinaunce,
That no man sholde doon men swich penaunce
The ferthe strook to smyten, softe or soore,
This tormentour ne dorste do namoore;

But half deed, with hir nekke ycorven there,
He lefte hir lye, and on his wey is went.
The cristen folk, which that aboute hire were,
With sheetes han the blood ful faire phent.
Thre dayes lyved she in this torment,
And nevere cessid hem the feith to teche;
That she hadde fostred, hem she gan to preche;

And hem she yaf hir moebles and hir thyng,
And to the Pope Urban bitook hem tho,

And seyde, I axed this at hevene kyng,
To han respit thre dayes and namo,
To recomende to yow, er that I go,
Thise soules, lo! and that I myghte do werche
heere of myn hous perpetuelly a cherche.

SAINTE URBAN, with his dekenes, prively
The body fette, and buried it by nyghte
Among his other seintes honestly.
Hir hous the chirche of Sainte Cecilie bighte;
Saint Urban halved it, as he wel myghte;
In which, into this day, in noble wyse,
Men doon to Crist and to his seinte servyse.

Here is ended the Seconde Nonnes Tale.

The prologe of the Chanons Yemannes Tale.

WHAN toold was al the tyf
of Sainte Cecile,
Er we hadde riden fully
fye mile,
At Boghton under Ble
us gan atake
A man, that clothed was
in clothes blake,
And underne the hewered
a surplys;

His bakene, that was al pomely grys,
So swatte, that it wonder was to see;
It semed as he had priked miles thre.
The hors eek that his Yeman rood upon
So swatte, that unne the myghte it gon.
Aboute the peyrel stood the foom ful hye,
He was of foom al flekked as a pye.

A male tweyflood on his croper lay,
It semed that he caried lite array.
Al light for somer rood this worthy man,
And in myn herte wondren I bigan
What that he was, til that I understood
How that his cloke was sowed to his hood;
for which, whan I hadde longe avysed me,
I demed hym som chanoun for to be.

His hat heeng at his bak down by a laas,
for he hadde riden moore than trot or paas;
He hadde ay priked lik as he were wood.
A clothe-leef he hadde under his hood
for swoot, and for to kepe his heed from heete;
But it was joye for to seen hym swete!
His forheed dropped as a stillatorie
Were ful of plantayne and of paritorie.
And whan that he was come, he gan to crye,
God save, quod he, this joly compaignye!
faute have I priked, quod he, for your sake,
Bycause that I wolde yow atake,
To riden in this myrie compaignye.

His yeman eek was ful of curteisye,
And seyde, Sires, now in the morwe tyde,
Out of youre hostelrie I saugh you ryde,
And warned heer my lord and my soverayn,
Which that to ryden with yow is ful fayn
for his desport; he loveth daliaunce.

freend, for thy warnyng God yewe thee good
chaunce!
Thanne seyde oure Hoost, for certes it wolde seme

Thy lord were wys, and so I may wel deme;
He is ful jocunde also, dar I leye.

Can he oght telle a myrie tale or tweye,
With which he glade may this compaignye?

WHO, sire? my lord? ye, ye, withouten lye!
He kan of murthe, and eek of jolitee
Nat but ynough; also sire, trusteth me,
And ye hym knewe as wel as that do I,
Ye wolde wondre how wel and craftily
He koude werke, and that in sondry wise.
He hath take on hym many a greet emprise,
Which were ful hard for any that is heere
To brynge aboute, but they of hym it leere.

As hoomey as he rit amonges yow,
If ye hym knewe, it wolde be for youre prow;
Ye wolde nat forgoon his aqueyntaunce
for muchel good, I dar leye in balaunce
Al that I have in my possessioun.
He is a man of heigh discrecioun;
I warne yow wel, he is a passyng man.

EL, quod oure Hoost, I pray thee tel me
than,

Is he a clerk or noon? Telle what he is.

Nay, he is gretter than a clerk, ywis,
Seyde this yeman, and in wordes fewe,
Hoost, of his craft somewhat I wol yow shewe.
I seye, my lord kan swich subtilitee,
But al his craft ye may nat wite for me,
And som what helpe I yet to his wirkyng,
That al this ground on which we been ridyng,
Til that we come to Caunterbury toun,
He koude al clene turne it up or doun,
And pave it al of silver and of gold.

AND whan this yeman hadde this tale ytold
Unto oure Hoost, he seyde, Benedicitee!

This thyng is wonder merveillous to me,
Syn that thy lord is of so heigh prudence,
Bycause of which men sholde hym reverence,
That of his worship rekketh he so lite;
His overslope nys nat worth a myte,
As in effect, to hym, so moot I go!
It is al bauty and totore also.

Why is thy lord so sluttish, I the preye,
And is of power bettre clooth to beye,
If that his dede accorde with thy speche?
Telle me that, and that I thee biseche.

WH? quod this yeman, wherto axe ye me?
God help me so, for he shal nevere thee!

But I wol nat avowe that I seye,
And therefore keep it secree, I yow preye,
He is to wys, in feith, as I bileve;
That that is overdoon, it wol nat preeve
Aright, as clerkes seyn, it is a vice.

Wherfore in that I holde hym lewed and nyce,
for whan a man hath overgreet a wit,
ful oft hym happeth to mysusen it;
So dooth my lord, and that me greveth soore.
God it amende! I kan sey yow namoore.

HEROF no fors, good yeman, quod oure
Hoost,

Syn of the konnyng of thy lord thou woost,
Telle how he dooth, I pray thee hertely,
Syn that he is so crafty and so sly.